WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1. A method of automatically evaluating an image
- 2 being processed in a photographic laboratory system which is
- 3 operable to produce a plurality of different selectable forms
- 4 of output, wherein said image is present in one of the forms
- of a physical image and of an image data set, and wherein the
- 6 evaluation of said image serves to determine whether or not
- 7 the image is of sufficient quality to merit processing into
- 8 one of said forms of output, the method comprising the steps:
- 9 determining grade values for each of one or more
- 10 characteristic image properties,
- 11 assigning target values to be met by the grade values
- relative to each of the one or more characteristic image
- properties and specific to each of said different forms of
- 14 output,
- 15 selecting one of said different forms of output, and
- 16 comparing the grade values to the target values for the
- 17 selected form of output.
 - 1 2. The method of claim 1, wherein each of the grade
 - 2 values comprises a grading factor that is determined in
 - 3 accordance with a given reference scale for each of the one or

more characteristic image properties.

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- 1 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more
- 2 characteristic image properties comprise at least one of
- 3 sharpness, contrast, exposure light level, resolution, grain
- 4 size, and percentage of a cut-off image portion
- 1 4. The method of claim 1, wherein said different
- 2 forms of output comprise a first form of output of individual
- 3 paper prints and a second form of output of index prints, and
- 4 wherein the target value assigned for said second form of
- 5 output for each of the one or more characteristic image
- 6 properties is set so that in every case the image will be
- 7 found of sufficient quality to merit processing into said
- 8 second form of output.
- 1 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the image is
- 2 processed into the selected form of output only if the grade
- 3 values meet the target values for all of the one or more
- 4 characteristic image properties relative to the selected form
- of output.
- 1 6. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more

- 2 characteristic image properties comprise a plurality of
- 3 characteristic image properties, and wherein the image is
- 4 processed into the selected form of output only if a combined
- 5 grade value for two or more of the characteristic image
- 6 properties for the selected form of output meets a
- 7 corresponding combined target value.
- The method of claim 1, wherein said different
- 2 forms of output comprise a plurality of different output
- 3 formats for paper prints.

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- 1 8. The method of claim 1, wherein said different
- 2 forms of output comprise outputs produced by a plurality of
- 3 different output devices.
- 9. The method of claim 1, wherein for a given
- 2 characteristic image property and a given form of output, a
- 3 different target value is set in different customer orders.
- 1 10. The method of claim 8, wherein said different
- 2 forms of output include a digital output by writing the image
- data set into a data-carrier device, and wherein the target
- 4 value assigned for said digital output for each of the one or

end and

- 5 more characteristic image properties is set so that in every
- 6 case the image will be found of sufficient quality to merit
- 7 processing into said digital output.
- 1 11. The method of claim 1, further comprising the
- 2 step of storing the image data set and the grade values for
- 3 each of the one or more characteristic image properties in a
- 4 data-storage device prior to transmitting said image data set
- 5 to an output device.
- 1 12. The method of claim 1, further comprising at
- 2 least one of the steps of
- 3 generating said image data set by scanning said physical
- 4 image,
- 5 reading said image data set from a data-storage device, and
- 6 receiving said image data set through a data interface,
- 7 wherein the image data set represents an input data set for
- 8 said photographic processing system.
- 1 13. The method of claim 12, wherein the grade values
- 2 for the one or more characteristic image properties are
- 3 determined from said input data set.

- 1 14. The method of claim 13, further comprising the
- 2 step of performing at least one image correction on the input
- 3 data set prior to determining the grade values for the one or
- 4 more characteristic image properties